

BETRAYED BUT UNBROKEN

INFIDELTY RECOVERY: 12 STEPS TO RESTORING YOUR MARRIAGE

D. Charles Williams, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist and Marriage & Family Therapist

Introduction

"A fool is someone who gives up something he loves for something he desires."

Of all the negative factors that affect marriage, infidelity is by far the most devastating one. It takes years to build trust and only seconds to destroy it. When emotional or sexual infidelity invades an established relationship, it can never be the same. The innocence and exclusivity that existed prior to a betrayal is history. Life as it was changes. Some never recover and they end their relationship or get divorced. Others are able to struggle their way through the "shame and blame" and the "agony and defeat" to a new normal. These couples slowly rise from the ashes to recover some vestige of love and mutual respect together. They painstakingly begin the process of remorse, forgiveness, commitment and the rebuilding of the trust that was lost. The offending party realizes too late that *you can do something in an instant that will give you heartache for life.*

STAGE I Discovery- "*The Reality Check*"

1. *Step One*: Recognition-

Suspicious

The discovery of a past or present affair is a day and time that will be etched in the mind and memory of the injured spouse forever. Most unknowing partners accidentally find an email, text message, picture, receipt or some other evidence leading them to further explore the inconsistency. They often have had a "gut feeling" or vague sense that something has been amiss for a while, but did not want to believe it. Others are caught totally off guard and have been oblivious to what was going on with their wayward partner.

Sometimes an anonymous person, friend or family member will relay concerns or observations they have had regarding the activities of one's spouse. Even questions from the children can be a relevant clue to clandestine behavior that could be occurring. No one wants to believe that their spouse could be cheating on them. Most likely telltale signs have been ignored or denied for quite a while.

2. *Step Two*: Typical Reactions

Denial as the First Line of Defense

Once the injured spouse has enough evidence to move forward to face the situation, the hardest part begins. The unfaithful spouse or partner typically resorts to rationalizations, denials, minimizations, blame-shifting and stonewalling in order to dismiss the accusations presented. Their emotions often range from a calm but detached dismissal to rageful indignation at the accusations.

Most straying spouses will outright deny the charges in the face of pretty overwhelming evidence in hopes to shake the resolve of their partner. Others will lie quite convincingly and have a number of reasonable explanations that could easily convince a jury.

During my years as an executive coach and management consultant, I had many opportunities to meet and work with CEOs and the executive officers of various companies. I remember vividly during a break at a presentation I was doing for a

group of CEOs, one of them asked about a fellow CEO who was not attending the meeting that morning. Another CEO responded, "*Oh, he made the mistake of being honest with his wife about an affair he was having and now she is divorcing him.*"

Denial seems to be the first response most unfaithful spouses offer when they are discovered. The more adamant and indignant the denial, the more likely it is to cause the questioning spouse to doubt themselves.

3. *Step Three: Taking Responsibility*

Total Disclosure

The person who accepts responsibility for his or her problem is the person who will overcome it. In order for the stages to progress toward some possible resolution, the unfaithful spouse or partner must begin to acknowledge and disclose the details of the affair, otherwise an impasse occurs. Even at this point, it is rare that total disclosure occurs immediately. Rather it leaks out slowly in painful stages as the wounded but unrelenting spouse continues to discover more secrets.

Then begins the "60-90 days of obsessing" as the betrayed partner tries to understand the "who, what, when and where" of the affair. Endless questioning occurs at this point sometimes to the detriment of the relationship. Further conflicts often erupt as more information is revealed. If the offending party does not fully discuss the specifics of the other relationship, however, reconciliation may be indefinitely postponed.

4. *Step Four: Relapse Prevention*

Ways to Insure the Affair Will Not Reoccur

The greatest fear of a betrayed spouse is that their partner will resume the relationship they previously had with the other person. Relapse prevention is designed to reduce that likelihood by establishing a mutually agreed upon plan of action. The suggestions below represent the best strategy for protecting your relationship from further damage.

1. Mutually agree that he or she will stop the affair immediately.

If your spouse is unwilling or unable to do this, you may either give them more time as defined by you, separate to protect yourself, or see an attorney about ending the marriage.

2. End all Contact.

Ending the affair can be done by email, letter, voice mail or a phone call. Most injured spouses prefer to listen to their spouse officially end the relationship by phone so both sides of the conversations are heard. A prearranged scrip of points to be made is generally preferred with the following included:

- "I am calling to end this relationship."
- "My spouse knows everything."
- "I do not want to lose my marriage."
- "There is no hope for this to continue."
- "Please do not try to contact me again through any medium."
- "I regret that this ever happened, it was the biggest mistake of my life."
- "Do you understand me?"

3. "Burn the Ships" (No way back)

When the straying partner voluntarily agrees to give access to all personal devices, accounts and communication mediums along with their passwords, there is a higher likelihood for the successful retreat from the affair. If arguments over "invasion of privacy" or protests over "control tactics" occur, chances are a lack of commitment toward recovery exists. Those spouses who willingly embrace this accountability are demonstrating an attitude of openness toward change.

4. Defining Limits and Setting Boundaries

The limits and boundaries established are often specific to how the affair has occurred. These are some common ones set by most injured spouses.

- Answer all questions asked of you by spouse.
- No texting, calling, emails, or social media contact with the opposite sex unless previously agreed upon together.
- No friendships with the opposite sex without the consent of one's spouse.
- No conversations or discussions with the opposite sex about their personal life or relationships.
- No time alone with the opposite sex unless agreed upon by one's spouse.
- No traveling with the opposite sex unless agreed upon by one's spouse.
- Call if you are going to be more than 15 minutes late.
- Return calls by spouse immediately.
- Call at regularly scheduled times during the day as agreed upon by spouse when traveling.

- Inform spouse immediately of any form of communication that occurs from the other party. Leave the message in its original form with no deletions or alterations.

5. *Step Five: Experiencing Remorse*

Most cheating spouses never expect that their actions will be discovered. They rationalize that they will eventually be able to get out of the other relationship undetected and no one will be the wiser. They do not anticipate the complexities that lying and deceit create. When their actions are discovered, the awareness of all the pain they have caused to countless people slowly is revealed to them.

If they do not deflect, justify or minimize their responsibility for the infidelity, they can begin to feel the devastation, hurt, anger, betrayal and agony that their loved ones feel.

There is a difference in feeling sorry for everyone who has been hurt after getting caught and actually feeling remorseful. A cheating spouse often feels guilty and ashamed for what he has done, but he may not be truly remorseful. Remorse occurs when he regrets his previous actions and wishes they had never occurred. Genuine remorse involves the element of repentance which is the demonstration of repairing the damage done whatever it costs.

STAGE II "What is?" "What isn't?"

6. *Step Six: Realizing the "Whys" -*

Why did this affair occur?

Answering this question will not make things better nor will it offer an acceptable excuse, but our minds often need explanations to make some sense of the contributing factors. Processing the meaning of the affair requires examining all the variables inside and outside the marriage that contributed to the betrayal in order to come to terms with it. The variables inside a marriage refer to problems that exist between the spouses. Problems outside the marriage refer to external factors such as jobs, in-laws, friends, stresses, and finances.

7. Step Seven: Reoccurring Forgiveness -

Forgiveness is the Most Important Step

Forgiveness is the most important step in restoring your marriage after an affair. Nothing good can come from the situation if forgiveness does not occur. Without forgiveness, bitterness is inevitable.

Allowing bitterness to remain within us is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die!

In *Getting Past the Affair*, Snyder, Baucan and Gordon found that 60-75% of couples who experienced an affair stayed together. 50% of them had a stronger relationship than before.

STAGE III- "WHERE ARE WE GOING FROM HERE?"

8. Step Eight: Re-evaluating Expectations of Each Other-

The objective of this step is to determine where the relationship is going from here. The focus is upon what you both want to keep about the way you are together and what needs to change. Getting past the affair without honestly evaluating what has been going on in your marriage is like putting a new coat of paint over rotting wood. If you don't identify what needs to be remodeled or replaced, you could find yourself back in the same state of disrepair in the future. Get real with each other and yourself because this is the best chance for you both to get what you really want from a relationship.

9. Step Nine: Repair and Restitution of the Relationship

This stage involves making repair attempts and restitution to a significant other. Making repair attempts offers the opportunity to heal what is broken by making amends in words and actions to someone who has been wronged. It involves feeling grateful for having another chance and taking the initiative to make things right. This attitude facilitates the process of forgiveness and the willingness to be vulnerable again.

Making restitution is the act of giving back to one's partner even more than is owed as a "show of good faith" toward restoring the relationship. It involves looking for

opportunities to make a difference by putting them before yourself or inconveniencing yourself on behalf of your significant other. This may be a one-sided effort on the part of the betrayer without much, if any, response for a period of time, while the wounded partner tries determine the sincerity and genuineness of the overtures.

10. *Step Ten*: Reconciling and Recommitting

After a period of repair attempts, amends and efforts toward restitution, many couples experience hope that the relationship can be saved. They make a mutual decision to move forward with the marriage. It is at this point that many couples drop out of counseling feeling that their marriage is on track for success. However, discontinuing treatment at this time is at best premature and could stall progress toward genuine reconciliation and recommitment.

Reconciling is a mutual decision to stay in the marriage and move forward. Recommitment is the decision to become a couple again and leave the past in the past. It involves making up, deciding to move forward, coming back together and resuming the relationship.

STAGE IV: DEEPENING EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

11. *Step Eleven*: Rebuilding Trust and Reconnecting

Deciding to move forward to heal the marriage and rebuild it into a better relationship than previously existed is a process that takes a while. Couples have to learn how to eliminate criticisms, blaming and fault-finding, and begin asking for what they want from each other. The risk of rejection associated with this type of vulnerability is more difficult than one might imagine. It begins with understanding what one's own needs are and being motivated to discover the true emotional needs of one's partner. All of this must occur under the protective umbrella of re-establishing commitment and exclusivity in the relationship. Identifying and reinforcing clear boundaries around the relationship while setting mutual expectations for each other serves to begin the long process of rebuilding the trust that has been shattered. While frequent and in depth communication is absolutely essential here, consistency in actions will speak louder than words.

12. *Step Twelve*: Reunion and Recovery-

Slowly deepening the relationship in ways that may have never been a part of their marriage helps a couple begin to realize what they have been missing together. Spending regular times as a couple without interruption for even brief periods each week is essential. Learning to move communication from “small talk” to emotionally intimate talk is a means toward deepening their closeness. Establishing non-sexual “rituals of affection” introduces affirmation, physical contact and playfulness between them. Facilitating the art of “conflict that brings closeness” enables couples to solve the reoccurring problems that sometimes erode relationships. All these areas and more have to be introduced into the relationship if closeness and connection are to occur.

(From Dr. Williams' upcoming book "Betrayed But Unbroken Infidelity Recovery: 12 Steps to Restoring Your Marriage" due out in 2016.)